

## (Are We Sure) It's Not a Date by kitkatt0430

**Series:** [Pride Month 2019 \[5\]](#)

**Category:** The Flash (TV 2014)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Anxiety, Bisexual Ralph Dibny, Cisco actually discussing why he's considering the cure, Cisco affirming his friendships, Cisco discussing his issues with his powers, Fake/Pretend Relationship, M/M, Pansexual Cisco Ramon, Ralph and Frost are bros, Ralph worries he's not really good enough, Season 5 AU, Self Confidence Issues, Sort Of, making Cisco's season 5 motivations actually sort of make sense, trying anyway

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Barry Allen, Caitlin Snow, Cisco Ramon, Killer Frost, Ralph Dibny

**Relationships:** Barry Allen & Cisco Ramon, Cisco Ramon & Caitlin Snow, Ralph Dibny & Killer Frost, Ralph Dibny/Cisco Ramon

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2019-06-20

**Updated:** 2019-06-20

**Packaged:** 2020-05-09 23:28:17

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 7,916

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

When Cisco blows his attempt to ask out Kamilla, Ralph pulls out his Book of Ralph again and cheerfully offers to walk through a 'fake date' with Cisco to help him figure out why he's having so much trouble getting back into the dating game. Being a fake date there shouldn't be any pressure or worries, right?

Except... Ralph is actually really attractive and funny and oddly sweet. Cisco's not so sure he wants this date to be fake after all.

## **(Are We Sure) It's Not a Date**

"So, how'd it go? Did she say yes?" Ralph bounced on the balls of his feet and drained the last of his beer.

Cisco just shook his head and groaned. "I blew it. Or she's not interested. Or both. I thought things were going well at first but..." 'obviously not' went unsaid.

"If she knew you were a superhero," Ralph teased leadingly, but Cisco shook his head.

"No, no way. I want someone who likes me for me, not because..." not because of something Cisco wasn't sure he'd ever really been. Playing dress up in pleather and using powers he'd never been totally comfortable with...

"Dude," Ralph gave him a worried look, "being Vibe is part of who you are. And who you are is pretty fucking amazing. You're just... in a slump and need your self confidence back, that's all." He slid his beer onto the bar and waved to the bartender - Kamilla - to get his check.

Cisco tried not to feel too awkward about striking out with her as he also got his check.

"Anyway," Ralph continued once Kamilla was out of earshot, "There's always The Book of Ralph and its..."

"Lists?" Cisco filled in, barely refraining from rolling his eyes.

"If you want to get back in the game, you gotta play to win my man," Ralph insisted. "My lists are golden."

"Your lists nearly got my beautiful hair cut."

"But you looked amazing in that outfit," Ralph shot back, slinging an arm around Cisco's shoulders as they left the bar. "Seriously. The only thing that accents your ass better is the Vibe suit."

Cisco choked and blushed and looked up at the taller man skeptically,

"since when do you check out my ass, Ralph?"

"I check out everyone's ass," Ralph responded cheerfully. "So don't go thinking you're too special or anything like that. Barry's is the best; running really does just tighten it up in all the right ways."

"Oh, god, no. We're not having this conversation about my best friend."

"What? Are you not into guys?" Ralph pulled his arm away. "I can shut up if its making you uncomfortable..."

"I'm pan; I'm totally into guys," Cisco replied. "But Barry's like... a brother? Yeah, he's like a brother. I really don't want to be thinking about his ass that way, okay? It's weird. And wrong."

Ralph snorted in amusement. "Oookay, then. I guess Caitlin is also a taboo subject butts-wise?"

"That's even worse, so yes. Off limits." Cisco wrinkled his nose. He loved Caitlin, adored her even. But thinking about her in any way that was remotely sexual was just... no. Big no.

"Right... so... where were we... right. The Book of Ralph and my lists. My amazing lists for getting over a broken heart and getting back into the dating game. I've got lists for how to successfully get a date and lists for prepping for a date and lists for the actual date..."

"In all the time I've known you, Ralph, I've never actually seen you go on a date," Cisco pointed out.

Ralph gasped, flinging a hand against his chest and mock staggering. "I know what you're implying and you wound me, Cisco. I am wounded. I've got game. The lists work and I will prove it to you."

"Really? How's that?"

"I... I am bringing those lists to STAR Labs tomorrow and we're gonna walk through them. All of them. Together. We'll have to have a fake lunch date and dinner date so you can get the full experience of just how charming one can be when following the advice I've laid out in my lists."

Cisco blinked hard for a moment because... Ralph might be a little tipsy, but Cisco had thought he, at least, was clear headed. But... "fake dates," Cisco clarified to be sure he'd heard what he'd just thought he'd heard.

"Yes. Fake dates. You know, not really dates? Just us hanging out but pretending its a date. It'll be flirty and fun." Ralph batted his eyes teasingly at Cisco. "Trust me, Cisco, it'll be fun. Guaranteed to snap you out of this funk of yours. Promise."

And... honestly, what did Cisco really have to lose by saying yes? Well... his dignity, probably, but Cisco was fairly certain he'd misplaced that some time ago anyway. "Yeah, sure. Why not?"

"Yes!" Ralph fist pumped and grinned dizzily. "Trust me, dude. We're gonna have so much fun."

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Ralph breezes into the cortex the next morning and drops a list in front of Cisco.

"What are these, cheesy pick up lines?" Cisco asks, glancing over the list and then looking at Ralph skeptically.

"They are not cheesy," Ralph grumbles. "They are to be delivered with heartfelt sincerity. Like..." he leaned against the wall, just slightly into Cisco's personal space, and gave him an intense look. "Anyone who thinks Disneyland is the happiest place on Earth never had a chance to spend time with you. Because the happiest place on Earth is wherever you are."

It was a cheesy, cheesy line. Completely terrible. And Ralph was just using it as an example, not because he was actually trying to pick Cisco up. And, yet... Cisco felt himself blush anyway.

"Or how about... my friends bet me I couldn't get the hottest guy in the bar to have a conversation with me. Want to have a few drinks on their tab?"

Cisco snickered at that one. "Those are so bad, no wonder you're single."

"Aww, man, come one. These are gems. Though I've had to ditch the 'running through my mind all night' line since finding out Barry's the Flash. It feels too much like encroaching on his territory." Ralph grinned and waggled his eyebrows at Cisco. "Come on, man, pick one and give it a try. I won't judge if you deliver the line badly."

Cisco rolled his eyes this time, but obligingly looked back at the list of pick up lines. "If I could rearrange the alphabet I would put U and I together.' Really? That's so lame, Ralph..."

"Don't just read the line. Take it as an example. Reword it. Own the line, Cisco, and make it yours."

"What's going on in here?" Caitlin asked, poking her head in and giving the duo an amused look.

"Ralph's trying to give me pick up line advice, but his list is so awful that I'm thinking maybe I should be helping him instead," Cisco informed her.

"Good luck with that, then. Just keep me out of it." She gave them a little mocking wave before heading down the hallway.

"Cisco. Just humor me, alright?" Ralph gave him that intense look again and...

Cisco would deny it if asked, but he melted, just a little. "Alright, fine." His eyes slid down the list and... "You must have a magnetic personality because I cannot get over how attractive you are," Cisco said, taking a line about eating magnets and making it a little less terrible.

"See? I'd totally have a drink with you if we were strangers and you were hitting on me at a bar," Ralph assured him. "Hot guy, cute line, you're set. Come on, lets do a few more. Try another one." He grinned winningly and Cisco fought down another blush.

Since when did he start blushing for Ralph anyway?

His eyes slid down the list a little further and then he snorted in amusement. "My mom won't believe I'm queer. Want to help me create some proof?"

"Your delivery on that one was way off, but good try," Ralph said with a grin. "I based that one off the whole 'my mom thinks I'm gay, help me prove her wrong' line. That one is genuinely awful, but flip the script and wow is it fun to play with."

Cisco shook his head. "No, its still terrible."

Ralph pouted and Cisco couldn't help but laugh at him.

"It didn't get hot in here until you walked in," Cisco purred, batting his eye lashes a little and... Ralph was suddenly blushing hard and avoiding Cisco's eyes.

"Uh, yeah, that's... I think you've got the picture now."

"It got bright in here all of a sudden," Cisco continued in the same faux sultry tone. "Must be you, lighting up my life."

"Right. You've definitely got it. I'll just let you... practice. On your own." Ralph fled the room and Cisco stared at the door.

What the hell just happened?

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Ralph burst into Caitlin's lab. "I need to talk to Frost for a few minutes."

Caitlin gave him a somewhat disgruntled look. "I'm in the middle of something here, Ralph."

"I know, but Frost is, like, my bro and I need her advice or her mockery or whatever, okay? Please?"

Sighing Caitlin nodded and then, like a switch flipped, her hair turned white and her eyes icy. "We're not bros," is the first thing Frost says when she looks at Ralph, eyebrow arched all judgmentally. "So, what am I mocking you for?"

"Um..." Ralph looked back at the doorway anxiously. "I think I may have screwed up? I, uh, asked Cisco to go on a fake lunch and dinner date with me today to show off how useful The Book of Ralph is, get him back into the dating game, shore up his self confidence, but..." he

avoided looking directly at her while he tried to figure out how to phrase the rest without sounding pathetic.

"Oh no. No no no... don't tell me you've got a crush on Cisco." Frost groaned at the sight of Ralph's expression turning all miserable. "Of course you do. You idiot. You screwed up good, Ralph. Ugh. Why do you do this to yourself?"

"I'm secretly a masochist," Ralph deadpanned.

"It isn't a secret," Frost muttered, eyeing Ralph doubtfully. "Lucky you, Cisco's pan. Maybe you can salvage something workable out of this disaster you've set yourself up for."

"He's not interested in me, though. I'm the funny idiot. No one likes the funny idiot that way," Ralph insisted.

"I am not your bro... but... maybe I can be your wingman." Frost gave him a pitying look. "Bring your list for the lunch date. Let's see what I can do to help."

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Ralph brought Frost the list and then was banished. Not to return to her until an hour before lunch for the annotated version of the list. And possibly the icy death version of the shovel talk.

Frost wasn't very clear on her position as to whether she genuinely thought Ralph and Cisco should date or if she just thought this was a plausible method of keeping Cisco from leaving Team Flash behind permanently.

Either way, though, it sounded like she was in Ralph's corner. Of course, the question was... was Ralph in his own corner? Because odds were Cisco wasn't even interested in Ralph. What did he have to offer in an a relationship, anyway? He was a screw up detective and a b-team vigilante at best (Cisco was clearly a-team) and Ralph knew everyone found him pretty obnoxious. If not for his powers, Ralph wouldn't even be allowed within a hundred feet of Team Flash.

So... it was never going to happen. Ralph knew that. He was fine with that. Until Cisco turned on the charm for the faux flirting and

suddenly Ralph was worried he was going to do something stupid in response. Like kiss Cisco.

Yeah, that... that wouldn't have gone over well. At all.

"Are you okay?" Cisco asked as Ralph wandered back into the cortex.

"Yeah, fine." Ralph had set himself up for a disaster of a day, but no backing out now. Following through a disaster to the bitter end was much more his style.

Cisco eyed Ralph curiously, but didn't push for details. "I still don't think your list of cheesy pick up lines are for me."

"Really? 'Cause you were totally rocking it there when I left." Ralph tried not to smack himself on the forehead because... why did he say things like that? Might as well write 'I've got a massive crush on Cisco' in neon letters and parade around STAR Labs with it at this rate.

Thankfully, Cisco was oblivious. "Yeah, whatever. Any other words of advice for breaking the ice? Bars... aren't really my scene anyway. Last time I successfully picked up a date at a bar I was actually being honey-trapped by Lisa Snart. Captain Cold's sister," Cisco elaborated when Ralph looked confused.

"Whoa, seriously?" Maybe Cisco needed more help than Ralph had thought. "Okay, so... coffee shop one liners then?"

"I dated a barista once. She turned out to have hawk powers and was a reincarnated priestess from Ancient Egypt... and she had a soulmate whom she dumped me to get back together with. So..."

"Your dating history is bizarre," Ralph said. And then he really did smack himself on the forehead because way to go insulting Cisco, there.

Cisco just laughed. "I don't know why I thought I could manage a normal date, really. I'm pretty clearly cursed." His expression went pensive and rueful and Ralph wanted to hug him so...

Why not?



"Um, Ralph?"

"Not a hugger, then, okay," Ralph flushed and pulled away. "Just seemed like you needed one..."

"No, that was fine," Cisco replied, sounding bemused. "A little warning next time?"

Which was basically permission to hug Cisco again. With prior warning, but still. Hugs. "Right. Sorry." Ralph grinned. "You're not cursed, Cisco. Just... bad luck. With my help, of course, your luck is definitely going to skyrocket."

Cisco gave him a fond look that made Ralph's stomach go all flippy. Good flippy. Or not good flippy since it made him want to kiss the other man. Whatever.

"Coffee shop one liners. And tips on how to identify who doesn't want to be approached. Ladies with earbuds or headphones? Definitely don't bother unless you need to borrow something off their table, like salt or napkins from a dispenser or something." Ralph barreled his way through, rambling so he wouldn't stammer.

"That I actually do know. I'm almost afraid to ask, but... what are the coffee shop pickup lines? Morbid curiosity is getting to me."

"If you need to take it slow, we can always cold brew," Ralph drawled, fluttering his eyes at Cisco. Who promptly dissolved into giggles. "Need me to grind those beans for you?" Ralph snickered when Cisco choked a little. "The opportunities for double entendres are awesome." Then, daringly, Ralph smirked and leaned in and murmured, "do you want a latte? I'm very gentle on the frothing rod."

"I really hope you don't actually use those as pickup lines," Cisco giggled helplessly, blushing but looking like he was having more fun than Ralph had seen him have in a long while.

"No, not really, pretty sure that'd be grounds for sexual harassment," Ralph admitted, smirking as he snuck an extra pun in there. "But I know some truly awful lines and they seem to cheer you up, so..."

Ralph tilted his head to the side, adding, "Barry's been worried about you."

"He has?"

"Yeah, well, you're his best friend and you've been unhappy since breaking up with your girlfriend... and now you want to get rid of your powers and leave Team Flash. And Barry is notoriously bad at starting difficult conversations. Like... didn't it take him fifteen years, or something, just to tell Iris how he felt? I think he's worried that if he tries to talk to you about where your head's at in all of this you'll get upset with him for wanting to talk you into staying. That your mind's made up and he's going to lose you anyway, so... might as well let things end on a good note than a tense one." Ralph swallowed hard because... he was kind of worried about that himself. But Cisco was in a better mood than normal, so Ralph didn't have too much to lose by broaching the subject. Or by throwing Barry under the bus. (He was faster than a speeding bullet; Barry could handle a bus or two.)

"Are you sure?" Cisco looked sad again and Ralph considered kicking himself.

He could do that so much more efficiently these days with the whole stretchy thing going on.

"He's certainly not going to confide in me, but I am pretty good at reading people Cisco."

"I've never really been totally comfortable with my powers," Cisco admitted quietly. "You know how I got them in general, right?"

"The accelerator accident in December 2013," Ralph said immediately. "Though I guess it took a while for them to manifest?"

"Yeah. I... a little over a year later something happened and I had nightmares afterwards. Of an alternate timeline where Eobard Thawne - who had taken Harrison Wells' identity - murdered me. That was my introduction to my visions, watching the man who mentored me and I trusted... shoving a vibrating hand into my chest to kill me."

"Oh my god," Ralph breathed out because... fuck, that was awful. He couldn't even imagine going through something like that and he'd been body-snatched by DeVoe. "I'm sorry you went through that."

"Yeah, well... I eventually developed my other powers. I like those better, but my visions have always been kind of unsettling. Like I can't get that first vision quite out of my head. I tried vibing the future once to try and move past my hangups and it sort of helped. Saw myself at my own wedding. Didn't want to see who I was getting married to, though, so I wouldn't spoil the surprise. But... I don't think that's my future anymore. I'm... kind of afraid I missed it, with Cynthia... not that she was interested in marriage. I turn thirty this April. I always thought that at thirty I'd at least be married, if not having a kid or two by now."

"So you were hoping maybe Kamilla would fill that spot," Ralph observed. "Cynthia encouraged you to embrace the powers that make you uncomfortable but couldn't offer the emotional stability you wanted... because you two were doing long distance and that was enough for her but not for you. It's just that... looking for someone the exact opposite of her isn't going to result in a relationship that automatically works. And if I'm overstepping, tell me and I'll shut up."

"You're not overstepping." Cisco sighed quietly. "You're a friend. And it sounds like you're pretty concerned too."

Ralph just nodded.

"I guess I have been afraid everyone is going to try and talk me out of it. Caitlin did. We had a big fight over it."

"I really don't want to fight about it," Ralph told him. "But I don't want you to go, either. Even if you get rid of your powers, you bring so much more to the team than I ever could. And there's gonna be this huge void without you that none of us are going to be able to fill."

"That's not... I'm not that important to the team," Cisco muttered. "My powers..."

"You're a genius, Cisco. Practically everything we use was invented by you. You make the suits, you're the voice on the comms nine times out of ten, not counting when you're out there with us, and... you make us all safe so that we come home in one piece while the bad guys go to jail. And I've only been here for, like, a year. So if I feel this way... I can't imagine how scared Barry and Caitlin must feel about having to do all this without you."

"Scared?" Cisco looked completely nonplussed by the idea.

"Like I said, you keep us safe with the gadgets and the suits. I may not get how any of it works, but I never doubt it will because you made them. It's kind of scary knowing we might have to make it all work without you. Caitlin's got the bio stuff, but we're gonna be short a mechanical genius with an amazing sense of aesthetics if you really leave the team."

"I do have an awesome sense of aesthetics," Cisco allowed. "I... I hadn't really thought of it that way. I've been so focused on contributing with my powers, I didn't really think about anything else I do around here."

"You're basically the MVP, Cisco. Versatile and probably more than a little overworked." Ralph shrugged. "I'm sorry your powers turned out to be so traumatic for you. But, like... you're really bright personality wise. You bring laughter and joy and fun to this place. So... maybe talk to everyone about this before you make two big decisions at once, okay? I think if you explain how you feel about your powers, you'll find we all support you doing what you need to feel good about yourself where those are concerned. But we all want you to stay a part of the team regardless of what abilities you do or don't bring to the table."

"Thanks, Ralph," Cisco rubbed at his eyes and... wow. Had Ralph managed to bring him to tears with that?

Hopefully those were happy tears.

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Frost marked up the lunch date list so much that Ralph absolutely cannot show that copy to Cisco. Not without being deathly

embarrassed.

She, and presumably Caitlin, have annotated the list with Cisco's likes and dislikes. His favorite restaurants. The cute and endearing things Cisco will do when he likes someone. And then Frost makes Ralph sit there and listen while she goes over the most important points of the Cisco Lunch Date List.

"Do you really think I've got a chance with him?" Ralph blurts out. "Or am I a last ditch attempt to convince Cisco to stick around STAR Labs?" He regrets asking immediately. Prays desperately for the floor to open and swallow him whole.

This is Central City so there's a good chance it'll happen. It does not happen.

"Oh, Ralph... this isn't a last ditch attempt to keep Cisco around. This is..." Frost actually looks nervous. "You were the first person to look at me and not be afraid. I like that about you. I hurt people but you... you thought I was hot and my hair was pretty. And even when I threatened to stab you with ice later on, you still weren't afraid of me."

"Well, knives really aren't that much of a problem for me anymore. I mean, some mugger shot me and I instinctively bounced the bullet back at him, so... dude basically shot himself in the ass trying to shoot me. Literally in the ass. Now if you'd been, like, threatening to freeze me, I'd probably shatter given my somewhat rubbery nature. But stabbing? We both know that's an 'you're annoying shut up now' threat, not a 'I genuinely want to kill you right now' threat."

Frost laughed and smiled at him. Points to Ralph.

"Have a good lunch date, Ralph. Bring me the dinner list afterwards so I can help you plan that too. Because, given the state of that list before I got my hands on it? You need all the help you can get."

Ralph stuck his tongue out at her before flouncing out of the room in a huff. He needed to make a new copy of the lunch list for Cisco before returning to the cortex.

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The lunch list was, predictably, really bad. Cisco completely understood why Ralph was single at this point.

There were a couple of hastily scratched out - but still readable - entries that had Cisco snickering at how terrible Ralph was at date planning. And how reliant Ralph was on cheesy pick up lines. Also everything involving social media was probably borderline cyber stalking at best. (There were a lot of cat video references too. Which... cat videos were, at least, a nearly universally liked thing.)

Really, Ralph needed to speak from the heart more often; he'd have better luck that way. After the frank discussion they'd had earlier, Cisco had found himself reevaluating Ralph and... he liked the dude a lot more than he'd thought. Ralph was attractive - not Oliver Queen hot, no matter what Iris and Caitlin said (Cisco was about 98% sure they'd just been saying that to annoy Barry), but still very attractive and ogle-worthy - and funny but... there was a streak of heartfelt sincerity there that just sort of... blew Cisco away.

Sure, Ralph had been a little clumsy in places, but... maybe Cisco had been feeling unappreciated lately because now Cisco felt very over appreciated. And maybe a bit worried that Ralph thought Cisco was more of a hero than he really was.

They ended up at Cisco's favorite lunch cafe where they got huge pizza slices and salad and ended up discussing *Princess Tutu*, of all things. Cisco never would have pegged Ralph as an anime fan, particularly not an anime featuring ballet so prominently. But Ralph not only knew the show, he knew the memes. 'Sashaying into darkness' and 'guitar ninjas but with ballet' and all the rest. Cisco was properly impressed. And maybe a little too impressed because...

This wasn't a real date. The whole point was that it was really just two friends hanging out and there was no pressure to be romantic, just... letting Cisco get his feet wet, as it were, in the shallow end while he eased back into the whole dating scene again. Not that Cisco had been great at the dating scene to begin with. But...

At one point, Ralph got sauce on his cheek and Cisco had this urge to lick it off. Kiss the corner of Ralph's mouth and tease the other man with the brush of his lips and...

Cisco hastily brought up the origin of Drosselmeyer's character as being from *The Nutcracker* and wasn't that interesting given the heavy *Swan Lake* influences on the show? Would that make the Raven a version of Rothbart?

Ralph licked away the sauce himself with a quick darted movement of his tongue and...

Cisco might've been a little lost.

Maybe dinner was a bad idea. But Cisco wasn't going to say anything even if it was.

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Cisco knocked on the doorway to Barry's lab and then wandered inside since the door was, as always, already open.

"Hey, Cisco, be with you in a few minutes..." Barry was in front of a printer, looking a touch frazzled. "Just need to get this report to Captain Singh ASAP, okay?"

"Yeah, sure. Running late again?" Cisco grinned when Barry stuck his tongue out at him.

"Anything I can help with, Cisco?" Nora asked.

"Nah, just wanted to talk to Barry for a few minutes. Whenever you've got time for a short break, that is," Cisco added, turning back to Barry.

Barry stapled the papers together and looked over them, making sure they were all there, then shoved them into a manila folder. "Nora, would you take those to the Captain?"

"Oh, sure." Nora grabbed the file and darted off at normal human speeds of fast.

"Wanna go outside to talk?" Barry asked. "I could use some time out of the lab right now. Worked through lunch today and I need to see the sky without glass in the way."

Cisco snorted in amusement and let Barry lead the way out of the

station to a nearby bench out by the street entrance.

"So, what's up? We're still on for me running the cure through the Speed Force tonight, right?"

"Yeah, we are," Cisco agreed. "It's, uh... I was talking with Ralph earlier and it occurred to me that, well, we haven't really talked about how I want to use the cure and maybe retire from Team Flash. I mean, not really. And I was also reminded that you're notoriously bad at starting up conversations about feelings, so... this is me asking you to tell me how you feel about all this. Because you're my best friend, Barry, and... I really do want your input on all this. Because if I go through with even just taking the cure, it's... it's going to be a big change. For all of us."

"I... oh, shit," Barry muttered, leaning back and staring up at the sky for a long moment. "You were the first person who believed in me as the Flash. The voice in my ear when I needed support. The one who built every single device that's ever saved my life. You shot Zoom when he broke my spine and might've killed me. You... you were the first real, consistent backup I've ever had... my best friend, even when i didn't deserve that friendship. When I walked into the Speed Force after the Speed Prison collapsed, I wasn't afraid because I knew you'd get me out one day. Admittedly, I thought it'd be years, not months, but you've always been a bigger genius than I can really comprehend. And honestly... your brilliance and your compassion have always been your biggest super powers. Not the visions or the breaches or the vibrational blasts. You're amazing Cisco. And I want to support you in making the decisions that you need to make to be happy."

"Even if that means supporting you in leaving us behind." Barry's voice cracked a little and, damn, Cisco didn't want to make Barry cry. "I... I am worried though that you'll regret getting rid of your powers. That... you'll regret not leaving yourself the option to be there if something were to happen to Caitlin or... that was the worst part of losing my powers when I traded them to Zoom to get Wally back. Not being able to do anything for Caitlin. Different circumstances and... I couldn't regret saving Wally, but... I don't want you to ever feel even remotely similar to how I did."



"You never really did talk about it. How you felt about losing your powers like that."

"Like I was hollowed out. There was a part of me missing. My brain... my body felt slow and sluggish and... at the same time I was just full of this nervous energy because I couldn't connect to the part of me that was missing and it hurt so much." Barry's voice was tight, pained. "I'm really, really hoping the cure doesn't make you feel that way. Because if you take it and regret it, there's no way to get your powers back afterwards. Because we are not risking you in yet another accelerator explosion. We've gone that route, we've had the Speed Force fake everyone out with my supposed death, it sucked for everyone, let's not do that again except with whatever force of nature governs your powers, okay?"

Cisco snickered. "Yeah, let's not do that. I'm sorry you felt that way and no one even asked. I should have asked, but I just..."

"Caitlin was in trouble and that trumped everything else. I get it." Barry let out a shaky breath. "I'd have lied anyway, to keep the focus on her. Where it belonged. And I don't think I could've talked about it then anyway. It was too... raw."

"Yeah..." Cisco let out a shuddering breath. "Still. I'm sorry."

"I don't say it enough, Cisco, but I really do appreciate everything you do for us."

"You make me sound like a much better person than I am," Cisco muttered uncomfortably. "The way I acted after finding out you gave up a life with your parents to set the timeline back again..."

"You were grieving for your brother and I know better than most that grief makes selfish assholes of us all." Barry offered Cisco a tentative grin and Cisco smiled back in response. "You don't give yourself enough credit, Cisco. And... we take you for granted, a lot. You deserve better. Which is another reason that as much as I want to be selfish and demand you stay - regardless of what you choose with your powers..."

"And it's not easy for any of us, having Nora here as a reminder that..."

"I'm not..." Barry swallowed hard. "I'm not going to be there to see her grow up. We lead dangerous lives and I totally get not wanting that for the kids you want to have one day. Not wanting to risk them having to grow up without you there. Especially since it sounds like the future is even more prejudiced against meta humans than it is now and Nora's proof our powers can be passed on to any biological children we have."

"And my visions suck," Cisco filled in quietly. "I don't get random visions as much as I used to, but its' always... I'm always a little afraid of the vibes that I don't consciously seek out."

"Because of the first vibes you had? About your death?"

"That's right." Cisco wrapped his arms around his chest and leaned against Barry's side. "I keep thinking everything would be easier if I didn't have my powers, but... I don't know if maybe breaking up with Cynthia - which, my powers and her powers were a big part of that relationship - and being targeted by Cicada and temporarily having my powers mostly blocked and... everything Nora represents about the future... if its just some perfect storm to make me doubt myself and I'll wind up regretting giving up my powers down the line when you or Caitlin or Ralph are in danger and... I hated being helpless before. When you were in trouble and none of us could reach you in time. You've got more backup now, but I..." Cisco sighed in frustration. "I don't feel like I can talk to Caitlin about this, not after the big fight we had over it already."

"Can I make a suggestion?" Barry asked, leaning back against Cisco.

"Go for it."

"The cure, if it works, isn't going anywhere. You can use it whenever you want, but once you take it there's no way to go back. So wait. Take time away from STAR Labs, maybe use some dampeners to remind yourself of what it feels like not to have powers, and... start looking for a therapist. Because, Cisco... you sound depressed to me. I know Iris and I kind of joked about it, but going to therapy helped us a lot." Barry straightened back up and put a hand on Cisco's shoulder, giving it a squeeze. "I should have said something sooner, but I have been worried about you, I just... am shitty at starting up

emotional conversations. As you've so aptly noted."

Cisco laughed softly and nodded. "That's not a bad idea," he agreed. "I've just sort of been throwing myself at things I think will make me feel happy again and that's... not really working. And group therapy did help a lot after Dante died. Thank you, Barry, for suggesting that."

Barry beamed softly, all pleased to have helped. "So what's this I hear about you and Ralph going on a date tonight? I thought you were going to ask Kamilla out, but then Caitlin - or Frost? - texted me earlier saying the two of you were flirting and going on lunch and dinner dates."

"They're not real dates," Cisco immediately protested, a smile tugging at his mouth. "I struck out with Kamilla last night and Ralph brought up more of The Book of Ralph nonsense and... I don't know. He offered the fake dates as a way to cheer me up and it was oddly sweet of him. So I said yes. And lunch was a lot of fun. I didn't realize we had similar taste in anime. I'm... actually really looking forward to dinner."

"Good. You deserve to have fun. And so does Ralph. He's changed so much since gaining his powers. Never in a million years would I have thought I'd be proud to have Ralph Dibny as a friend, but I am."

"He's been a good friend," Cisco agreed. "If I... if I do end up leaving STAR Labs, I'm not going to be leaving you guys behind. You know that, right? We'd still hang out and do movie nights," Cisco blurted out, suddenly feeling this lump in his throat. "Some things will never change. And how much I love you and Caitlin is one of those things."

"I love you too, man." Barry stood up and then offered Cisco a hand up as well. "You know you've got to talk to Caitlin about this, though... right?"

"Yeah... I know."

---

Cisco heads back to STAR Labs and drops in on Caitlin.

"Telling tales to Barry about Ralph and I? Or is was that Frost gossiping?" Cisco teased as he settled in a chair.

"Frost is definitely the gossipy one," Caitlin declared, but the way her smile held a hint of a smirk probably meant it was the other way around. "How'd your lunch date go?"

"It was fun," Cisco replied evenly, giving her an arch look. Then he softened his expression. "You know I love you, right?"

"Oh, Cisco." She came over and hugged him. "Yes, I do. And I love you too, sweetie."

"I just... I wanted to be sure you know because..."

"Because you're afraid that being a meta and a vigilante and working with vigilantes means your life isn't stable enough to maintain a romantic relationship? That being a hero means dying like Ronnie or not getting to be there for future children like Barry?" Caitlin sighed quietly. "I don't doubt your friendship or how much we mean to each other. But I can't exactly blame you for wanting out of Team Flash and feeling like... you can't have it all and you have to choose so you're... not choosing us." Caitlin blinked hard and Cisco realized she was blinking back tears.

"Yeah. All of that. When we came up with the idea of a cure for metahumans it seemed like the answer to everything that was making me unhappy or scaring me lately and... it seemed like the right answer. But now I'm having doubts that its what I want. I just... I feel like I'm mentally spinning my wheels on this and getting nowhere. Barry suggested that maybe I should try therapy again and I think maybe he's right." Cisco reached out and snagged her hands. "But whatever I end up doing, I want you to know that I'm always going to keep you in my life. You're my family, Cait. I'm never letting you go. Not choosing my powers or the team isn't the same as not choosing you. I'll always choose you."

Caitlin smiled, tentatively, and she hugged him again.

"Are you crying?" he asked when she sniffled.

"No."

"Cause I might be crying. Just a little." Cisco had been tearing up some himself at this point.

"Okay, fine." Caitlin sniffled again. "A couple of tears isn't crying," she muttered, ducking her head as she pulled away from the hug and then wiped at her eyes.

"It's totally crying. We're both saps." Cisco grinned and Caitlin laughed. Things finally felt settled between them in a way they hadn't since their big fight.

"So, looking forward to your dinner date with Ralph tonight?" Caitlin asked, blatantly changing the subject back to what'd been before Cisco went and had emotions all over the place.

"Yeah. I really am. He's a lot of fun to spend time with. And I'm not... I'm not stressing about it, the way I would have if Kamilla were the one I was meeting tonight. Which..." Cisco grimaced a little. "I wanted to date her because she seemed smart and fun and would slot really nicely into a safe, married life with kids and maybe a dog, but... I wasn't really wanting her so much as what she represented to me. And I think I'm glad she said no because I probably wouldn't have realized that if she'd said yes. It wouldn't have really been fair to her, even if I did end up liking her for her."

"What about with Ralph?" Caitlin pressed.

"Technically we're not going on real dates," Cisco protested. Caitlin just raised an eyebrow with a 'don't make me repeat the question' expression on her face. "I like spending time with Ralph because he's Ralph. He's smarter than he gives himself credit for and funny and hot... and if our dinner date were a real date I think I'd actually like that. I'm not trying to fill a slot or tick off boxes or something in a list of 'how to get the ideal future', I'm just... enjoying myself because I enjoy being with him."

"That sounds like the foundation for a healthy relationship," Caitlin observed, patting Cisco's shoulder.

"It's just a little hilarious to be saying that when his Book of Ralph is basically the ultimate relationship check list."

"And his Book of Ralph has yet to actually be useful for either of you. Unless you count the lists failing so badly that you're cheered up by the sheer ridiculousness of it all," Caitlin countered. "Maybe that's the real point of his book."

"That's... not a bad theory."

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*Ralph tugged nervously at his collar. "So, bowling. I suck at it, but I hear you enjoy it. So I thought... bowling date? We could have dinner and then you could teach me and it'd be both fun and educational?"*

*Cisco grinned. "Sounds fun. Let's do it."*

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*"Anyway, I was thinking maybe we could do karaoke..." Ralph trailed off when Nora blocked the way out of the cortex.*

*"I need you two to stay because, um, I, uh..." She hesitated and then rallied. "Dad's birthday is coming up and I was thinking... surprise party?"*

*Cisco's eyes narrowed. Nora was lying - and lying badly at that. He glanced at Ralph, who shrugged. "Yeah, sure. Is Iris in on this?"*

*"Uh, yeah, she's in the Lounge already. Just let me grab Caitlin and Sherlock..."*

---

*Cisco giggled. "Oh, that was the best part of the episode, though."*

*"Ugh, no, it was terrible. Totally twigged my second hand embarrassment and it was so intensely uncomfortable to watch I had to walk out of the room." Ralph blushed a little. "Came back in once it sounded like the scene changed. If someone had been watching with me, it might've been easier to take. Or I might've been, like, hiding my face against their shoulder. Can't even watch most cringe comedy because I react like that," he admitted, avoiding Cisco's gaze.*

*"Well, if you want to rewatch the show with me, I wouldn't object to*

*skipping over the parts that trigger you that way. I mean... I've skipped past the scene where the Goblet spits out Harry's name in the **Goblet of Fire** on rewatch for years because that part is so uncomfortable to me."*

*"Wait, really? Me too."*

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*"You've never seen **Firefly**?" Cisco's eyes went wide. "Oh, no, that's so sad. You'd love it so much. You have to watch it. I have to show it to you. I mean... there are jokes about juggling ducks in there, Ralph."*

*"Do they actually juggle ducks?"*

*"Sadly, no. No actual ducks are juggled. But space cowboys in abundance."*

*"Hot space cowboys?"*

*"Nathan Fillion."*

*"How has this not been in my life already?"*

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It feels like every little thing is setting of Cisco's vibe sense tonight and while he couldn't do anything while they needed his powers to complete the plan to stab Cicada - it sucked he got away, but at least he took a painful souvenir with him and no one died - but now it was over and Cisco decided to follow a little of Barry's advice early. He put the two power dampening cuffs on and instantly felt the alternate versions - the fifty-two alternate versions - of that night die down to nothing.

Sighing in relief, Cisco eyed the blue glow of the cuffs and wondered why he'd never tried this before. When his powers got overwhelming before he'd just... made himself grin and bear it. He didn't have to, though. They had these things for a reason. There were metas out there only STAR Labs knew about who used this tech for control their powers in their sleep or getting through stressful days and why had Cisco never thought that he was allowed to do the same?

*"Hey, Cisco, oh..." Ralph tilted his head to the side. "What's with the cuffs?"*

"Too much proximity to fifty-two different versions of how the night went," Cisco told him. "I needed a break from the visions."

"Ugh. That sounds awful. Good choice. So, uh, guess we didn't get to have our date tonight. But I think maybe you got cheered up anyway, so that's cool..." Ralph looked exceedingly nervous.

"We went bowling. And to karaoke. And a few other things too," Cisco said quietly. "I had visions of some of those dates, impressions of others. Sometimes we stayed here and baked cookies with Nora and talked surprise party plans for Barry's birthday. Which now I actually want us to do that because some of those party plans sounded awesome. But the point is... we spent fifty-two versions of tonight together and I liked spending time with you. I would like to keep spending time with you. If that's alright."

"I... yes? I mean, we're friends, so of course we're going to..." Ralph trailed off when Cisco grabbed his hands.

"I mean, going on a real date. If you were interested in real dating with me, that is."

"You want to go on a date with me?" Ralph's eyes went all wide and shocked. "But... I'm the idiot who didn't realize for a whole year that Harry was from a different version of Earth."

"Okay, yes, you're terrible at parsing verbal cues, but we also should have sat you down and explained the weird shit we've encountered over the years that you were now likely to encounter. And, impressively, you worked out the multiverse on your own just from the evidence that time travel was real. So you're not an idiot, Ralph. You just process stuff differently from the rest of us. We've needed that. You've been invaluable to have around and a supportive friend and... I like spending time with you. I would like to spend more time with you you," he said, repeating his earlier sentiment. "I've been trying so hard to force myself into this box that my own attempts to make myself happy have only been making me more miserable. I don't feel like I'm boxing myself up when I'm with you though."

"Oh," Ralph squeaked, blushing. "That's... that's good. I'm glad I could help, I..." he trailed off with a sharp inhalation when Cisco



kissed his cheek. "That was nice."

"So... date? Real date?"

"Yes. I would like a real date." Ralph was beaming and Cisco couldn't help but bask a little at how adorable Ralph looked like this.

"You know... The Book of Ralph has never actually worked before."

"First, I knew it," Cisco crowed. "Secondly, it didn't work this time either. You got a date despite The Book of Ralph, not because of it."

"No, no it worked. It has finally worked. I should publish it as a how to guide for getting a date with a hot genius mechanical engineer. Success!!!!"

"You're a dork," Cisco sighed. "So, want to get pizza tomorrow night and then watch some *Firefly*? I feel like after how tonight went, I want something kind of low key."

"What's *Firefly*?"